

Working Draft

TO: Superintendents and Other Interested Parties
FROM: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education
DATE: December 18, 2006
RE: Guidelines for Commonwealth Pilot School Option (Working Draft 12-12-06)

Massachusetts Department of Education Guidelines for Commonwealth Pilot Schools Option

The four schools listed below have each been in underperforming school status for four or more years, and during that time have not demonstrated sufficient improvements in student performance to exit that status. The Commissioner, in accordance with M.G.L. c. 69, sec. 1J, has recommended that these schools be declared to be chronically underperforming:

- English High School, Boston Public Schools
- Academy Middle School, Fitchburg Public Schools
- Duggan Middle School, Springfield Public Schools
- Putnam Vocational-Technical High School, Springfield Public Schools

The Board of Education has agreed to offer these four schools a choice – to become a Commonwealth Pilot School, patterned on the Pilot School model developed and implemented within the Boston Public Schools, or to be declared a chronically underperforming school, making the school subject to increased state intervention and oversight and expanding district and school leadership authority in accordance with state law. This document provides an explanation of the Pilot Schools model that is being offered as an option to these four underperforming schools.

I. Background on the Pilot Schools Model

What Are Pilot Schools and What Is Their Purpose?

The Commonwealth Pilot School option is patterned largely after the Pilot School model that was created within the Boston Public Schools. The result of a partnership among the Boston Mayor, School Committee, Superintendent, and Teachers Union (BTU), the Boston Pilot Schools were opened in 1995 to promote increased choice options within the school district, largely in response to 1993 state legislation creating charter schools. Pilot Schools are unique in the nation in that, by virtue of an innovative teacher union contract, they have autonomy over budget, staffing, governance, curriculum/assessment, and the school calendar to provide increased flexibility to organize schools and staffing to best meet students' needs, while operating within the economies of scale of a larger public school district. Pilot Schools were explicitly created to be models of educational innovation and to serve as research and development sites for effective urban public schools.

The Pilot School model represents an innovative partnership between a public school district and its local teacher union. Each partner agrees to allow approved Pilot Schools to be free from constraints in order to be more innovative. Pilot Schools are subject to state and federal laws but are exempt from district policies and mandates. Teachers who

Working Draft

work in Pilot Schools are exempt from teacher union contract work rules, while still receiving union salary, benefits, and accrual of seniority within the district. Teachers voluntarily choose to work at Pilot Schools; when hired, they sign what is called an “election-to-work agreement,” which stipulates the work conditions for the school for the coming school year. This agreement is approved by the school’s governing board, and revisited and revised annually with teacher input.

Pilot Schools’ governing boards have increased authority over traditional school councils. The governing boards set the school’s vision, hire and annually evaluate the principal (with the superintendent having final authority), determine the annual election-to-work terms for teacher union members, and approve the annual budget. Pilot School governing boards consist of the principal, faculty, parents, community members (higher education, business, and community agencies), and for high schools, students. Faculty, parent, and student representatives are elected by their peers, while community members are selected by the overall governing board.

What Are The Defining Characteristics of Pilot Schools?

Pilot Schools have the following defining characteristics that enable them to be more innovative:

- **Autonomous.** The defining principle of Pilot Schools is that if schools are provided maximum control over their resources to be more innovative, in exchange for increased accountability, student engagement and performance will improve. Pilot Schools have autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum/assessment, governance/policies, and the schedule.
- **Accountable.** Every school is held to high standards of performance through a school quality review process using a set of benchmarks that articulate the criteria for high-performing schools.
- **Personalized.** Pilot Schools place great emphasis on creating a nurturing school culture in which teachers attend closely to each student’s learning needs.
- **Vision-Driven.** Every Pilot School has a vision focused on the fundamental belief that, given the right conditions for learning, every child can achieve at high levels. The Pilot autonomies enable a school community to unify around its established vision, including having the power to hire teachers and staff who support this vision.

Pilot Schools’ Growth and Outcomes in Boston

Beginning with five Pilot Schools enrolling about 900 students in 1995, there are now 20 Boston Pilot Schools enrolling approximately 6,400 students, or 11% of the total Boston Public Schools (BPS) enrollment. As reported in a January 2006 report by the Center for Collaborative Education, a nonprofit organization that provides support to Boston’s Pilot Schools, on the whole Pilot Schools have outpaced district averages on multiple indicators of student engagement and achievement – higher attendance, lower suspensions and transfers, higher graduation and college-going rates, and on the MCAS, higher scores in every grade tested in both math and English, and at both the passing and advanced/proficient levels.

Working Draft

These findings are the result, in part, of how Pilot Schools use their resources differently. With a per pupil budget similar to regular BPS schools, Pilot Schools as compared to the district average have:

- **Low class sizes:** Pilot Schools average 19-20 students per class.
- **Low overall student-teacher loads:** In secondary schools, Pilot Schools average 55-60 students per teacher.
- **Long instructional periods:** Longer blocks of learning time enable increased project-based and hands-on learning.
- **Significant collaborative faculty planning time:** Increased common planning time focused on improving instruction is a key correlate to increased student achievement.
- **A nurturing culture:** Pilot Schools feature a variety of ways of personalization, including advisories, learning centers, and student support teams.
- **Graduation by competency or mastery:** In most Pilot Schools, in order to graduate (from eighth or twelfth grades), students must demonstrate mastery of a defined set of competencies (skills and content knowledge) through a series of assessments, including portfolios and exhibitions.

II. Guiding Principles for Commonwealth Pilot Schools

The Commonwealth Pilot School (Co-Pilot) model is framed around the following principles:

- Provide maximum autonomy over resources, in exchange for increased accountability for student results
- Ensure buy-in and ownership of the Commonwealth Pilot School model by the school community
- Ensure that the right conditions are in place for each school to be successful
- Closely document the progress and process of each school, so that there is ample data and feedback to use in mid-course correction and improvement

III. The Process of Converting to a Commonwealth Pilot School

The process for converting a candidate for designation as a chronically underperforming school into one or more Commonwealth Pilot Schools begins with a decision by the district Superintendent, School Committee, and union leadership to explore the potential benefits of this option. If there is leadership agreement to pursue the Commonwealth Pilot School option, the existing school's faculty and administration will be informed of the guiding principles for design of Commonwealth Pilot Schools and will be asked to vote in favor or opposition to conversion of the school into one or more Commonwealth Pilot Schools based on these design principles. The number of Commonwealth Pilot Schools to be formed will depend on the number of students served by the school undergoing conversion. As a general rule, the enrollment per school in a Commonwealth Pilot School shall be no fewer than 250 and no more than 450 students.

If the proposal to convert the school into one or more Commonwealth Priority Schools is approved by a two-thirds majority of faculty and administrators presently employed at the

Working Draft

school, the Commissioner will defer action until the February 2007 Board of Education meeting on the pending motion to declare the school chronically underperforming. The Department will provide district and school leaders and school faculty members with time and support, between December and February, for the development of initial design proposals for the Commonwealth Pilot School(s) into which the school will be converted.

The Superintendent, with agreement from the district's teacher union president, shall appoint a design team for each proposed pilot school. Each design team will be composed of district administrators, faculty, parents, students, community members, and external partners. Design team members will collaborate on the development of a proposed pilot school design to serve a target enrollment and span of grades specified by the Superintendent.

District design teams will receive guidance and assistance from the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) to facilitate the Pilot school proposal development process. Initial design proposals that include proposed work conditions for the first year must be approved by the district Superintendent, school committee, and teachers' union leadership before being submitted to the Department of Education for consideration. A district's proposal to convert an underperforming school into Commonwealth Pilot Schools must be supported by evidence that the district has identified an appropriately qualified leader to serve as the principal of each school. **The deadline for submission of proposals to the Department is February 9, 2007.**

The Commissioner will appoint State Review Panels to consider district proposals to convert underperforming schools into Commonwealth Pilot Schools. If the State Review Panel recommends approval of the initial Pilot school proposals presented by the district, the Commissioner will request Board action at the February 27, 2007 Board meeting to approve the conversion of an underperforming school into Commonwealth Pilot Schools.

Upon Board approval of their proposed Pilot school designs, district and school leaders may begin selecting staff for those schools. Information about the planned Commonwealth Pilot Schools, including details of the work conditions for the Pilot school for the coming year, will be shared with staff currently employed at the school undergoing conversion. Teachers currently employed at the school being converted who wish to join the faculty of one of the new Commonwealth Pilot Schools will have the right to be considered first for those openings. Teachers who do not wish to be considered for employment in one of the district's new Commonwealth Pilot Schools may request reassignment to available positions in other district schools.

After initial approval of its proposal to convert a school to one or more Commonwealth Pilot Schools, district design teams will have additional time, until April 13, 2007, to refine their designs and develop implementation plans for new Commonwealth Pilot Schools that will open in September 2007. The Center for Collaborative Education and the Department of Education will provide continuing support and assistance during the implementation planning and execution stage of the Commonwealth Pilot School

Working Draft

conversion process. Commonwealth Pilot Schools will be eligible to receive implementation grant support from the Department.

IV. Guidelines for Adopting the Commonwealth Pilot School Model

District Conditions

Districts that propose to convert an underperforming school into Commonwealth Pilot Schools are required to have the following conditions in place:

- 1) **Local Approval.** The superintendent and local teacher union president must approve in writing the school's conversion into one or more Commonwealth Pilot Schools.
- 2) **Autonomy.** Agreement must be reached with the local teacher union and the school committee to extend to the school's governing body full autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum/assessment, governance, and schedule, releasing the school from district mandates and union work rules that would otherwise apply.
- 3) **School Budgets.** The school committee and superintendent must agree to provide the school with a budget appropriation that is equal to or greater than the district average per-pupil expenditure for school-based costs times the number of students to be enrolled at the pilot school. The calculation of district per-pupil average cost shall include the costs of students in regular education, English Language Learners, vocational education, and mild to moderate special education students. The total funds disbursed to a Commonwealth Pilot School per year will be adjusted based on the actual enrollment of students in the school on October 1 of each year. In calculating and reporting to the district and state their budgets, Commonwealth Pilot Schools shall budget the actual salaries of faculty that they hire. As well, districts shall make available to pilot schools central discretionary services, allowing pilot schools to either choose to purchase the service or instead have the equivalent per pupil funds included in their school budget.
- 4) **Salaries and Transfers.** Local teacher union members who work at a Commonwealth Pilot School shall accrue seniority in the district and shall receive, at a minimum, the salary and benefits established in the local teacher union contract. Employees shall work in Commonwealth Pilot Schools on a voluntary basis, and may excess themselves (or transfer) at the end of the school year.
- 5) **Companion Voluntary Pilot Schools.** Each district in which a Commonwealth Pilot School decides to convert to Pilot status is encouraged to create at least one voluntary start-up or conversion Pilot School, to serve as a companion and potential "lighthouse" to newly formed Commonwealth Pilot Schools.
- 6) **Accountability.** Each Commonwealth Pilot School will be held to strong measures of accountability. The Department of Education will annually analyze the school's SIMS, MCAS, and MEPA data, along with supplemental data on school practices submitted by each school and publicly report on the school's progress on multiple indicators of student engagement (attendance, suspension, transfers), and

Working Draft

achievement (grade retentions, course failures, honor roll, graduation, college-going, MCAS).

The Department will also track and report on school practices being employed to improve student performance (e.g., class size and student-teacher loads in core academic subjects, length of student and teacher day, amount of professional collaborative time, length of instructional periods, average time in advisory groups, average time on core academic instruction for teachers and students).

At the conclusion of two years in Commonwealth Pilot School status, each school will undergo a school quality review. The school will develop a portfolio of evidence based on a set of pre-identified benchmarks of performance. The school will host a site visit by a team of external practitioners who will collect evidence, rate the school against the benchmarks, and report findings and recommendations to the district, teacher union, and Department of Education.

School Conditions

Commonwealth Pilot Schools will be required to have the following conditions in place:

- 1) **Faculty Buy-In.** The school's faculty must vote by a minimum of two-thirds to convert to Pilot status.
- 2) **Design Team Formation and Proposal Development.** School administrators and faculty will participate with district leaders and external partners on design teams that will prepare the school for conversion into one or more Commonwealth Pilot Schools. Design teams will include the principal, faculty representatives, parents, community members, and in the case of high schools, students, and may include external partners recruited to support the school's conversion into redesigned pilot schools. The design team will be responsible for crafting a proposal for the new Pilot School. The proposal must meet all of the requirements set out in the Department of Education's Commonwealth Pilot Schools Guidelines and must be presented in the application narrative form specified by the Department. Pilot School request for proposals. Proposals will be submitted to the superintendent, teacher union president, and Department of Education for review and approval. Schools that do not receive approval from the Board of Education for conversion to Commonwealth Pilot Schools may be designated Chronically Underperforming schools.
- 3) **School Size.** Schools currently serving over 450 students must propose to downsize to a Pilot school serving a maximum of 450 students, or may propose conversion of the school into multiple small separate schools sharing a common facility.
- 4) **Principal Hiring.** The selection of a principal to lead a Commonwealth Pilot School shall be mutually agreed upon by the district Superintendent and the Commissioner of Education. The school principal's annual evaluation, while the school remains in Commonwealth Pilot School status, shall be the shared responsibility of the

Working Draft

Superintendent and the school's governing board, and shall be subject to oversight by the Commissioner's State Review Panel designee(s).

- 5) **Annual Work Conditions.** Teachers who work in Commonwealth Pilot Schools are exempt from teacher union contract work rules, while still receiving union salary, benefits, and accrual of seniority within the district. Teachers voluntarily choose to work at Commonwealth Pilot Schools; as a condition of employment at the school, teachers sign what is called an "election-to-work agreement," which stipulates the work conditions for the school for the coming school year. Work conditions should be organized to maximize student learning time and provide ample time for teacher professional development and collaboration. In the first year, the terms of the teacher election-to-work agreement will be developed by the school's design team and approved by the district superintendent and teacher union leadership, consistent with the design specifications for a Commonwealth Pilot School set out in the Guidelines approved by the Board of Education. Thereafter on an annual basis the school's governing board shall revisit and revise the terms of the agreement with teacher input.
- 6) **School Practices.** The proposal for each Commonwealth Pilot School must provide evidence of the following practices:
 - The school administers school-wide math and English language arts assessments that are aligned with the curriculum and state frameworks, 4-6 times per year
 - The school tracks assessment results, and uses this data to inform curriculum, instruction, and individual student support
 - The school schedule provides ample time on a daily and weekly basis for instruction and individualized student support in math and English language arts (for students who are not yet proficient, the recommended amount of time is 90 minutes per subject per day)
 - The school provides before- and after-school academic support opportunities (e.g., tutoring, learning center, peer study groups, homework help) for students who need it
 - The school has full-time faculty coaches for both English language arts and math, who are responsible for providing faculty with classroom observation and feedback on the quality of curriculum delivery, instructional practice, and data use
 - School administrators periodically evaluate faculty, including evaluation of content knowledge, tied in part to evidence of effective instruction leading to student learning, and commitment to the school's culture and pilot school model
 - The weekly and annual faculty work schedule provides ample time for regular interdisciplinary team, department, and full faculty meetings to discuss instructional practice, curriculum, assessment, school-wide improvement, and individual student progress. No less than one hour per week and no fewer than five days per year (or the hourly equivalent) should be devoted to collaborative work and professional development dedicated to instructional improvement.
- 7) **Governance.** Each Commonwealth Pilot School will have a governing board that includes representatives of the school's administration, faculty, parents, community members, and in the case of high schools, students, and external partners committed

Working Draft

to achievement of the school's mission. This board is responsible for setting the vision, annual budget approval, participating in the annual evaluation of the principal (with the superintendent having final authority), and approving the annual work conditions for faculty. Each governing board will establish by-laws for meeting, membership, decisions, and communication. The initial membership of a Commonwealth Pilot School's governing board and initial appointments to board leadership roles will be mutually agreed upon by the superintendent and teacher union president.

- 8) **Compliance with State and Federal Laws.** Every approved Commonwealth Pilot School must comply with all federal and state laws and regulations and court orders, including those relating to diversity of students and teachers, special education, and English Language Learners. The local superintendent and school committee shall retain responsibility to ensure the quality of education offered, protect the rights and interests of students and staff, and oversee the expenditure of public funds at each Commonwealth Pilot School.
- 9) **Commonwealth Pilot Schools Network.** Commonwealth Pilot School administrators and faculty will be part of a statewide network of schools working together to improve student learning. The network will provide professional development opportunities and supportive activities in conjunction with the Department of Education's Commonwealth Pilot School initiative partners.

V. Timeline

The following timeline has been established for districts with schools that have been recommended for a designation of chronic underperformance to apply for conversion of those schools into Commonwealth Pilot Schools:

Date	Action
December 19, 2006	Districts request Board of Education approval to pursue Commonwealth Pilot School option
December 20	Dept. of Education guidelines on Commonwealth Pilot School option disseminated to districts and target schools
December 15 – January 15	Faculty consideration of Commonwealth Pilot School conversion option. Faculty vote to approve or disapprove conversion to pilot schools.
February 6, 2007	For districts without Pilot contract language, parties have agreed to new contract language establishing Pilot Schools
January 29 – February 2	Week-long Commonwealth Pilot School design institute for design teams developing pilot school proposals
February 9	Initial proposals for Commonwealth Pilot Schools, outlining the conceptual framework of the school and proposed work

Working Draft

	conditions, approved locally and submitted to Dept. of Education
February 12-23	State Review Panels review proposals and make recommendations to Commissioner and Board
February 27	State Board of Education votes on approval of Commonwealth Pilot School proposals
February 28 – March 15	Information on design for new Commonwealth Pilot Schools shared with faculty. Election-to-work agreements signed by faculty seeking appointment to positions in new pilot schools
April 13	Final proposal and initial implementation plan for each Commonwealth Pilot School submitted to Department.
April 30	Teacher assignments from conversion school and transfers from other district schools completed. External hiring, as needed, begins.
June 22	Initial membership and leadership roles for governing boards established

VI. Proposal Submission

Initial proposals for Commonwealth Pilot Schools must be submitted no later than close of business on February 9, 2006. Please submit three copies of each proposal, with supporting documents, to the Department of Education, attention Juliane Dow, Senior Associate Commissioner, Accountability and Targeted Assistance, 350 Main St., 5th floor, Malden, MA 02148.